



**BENJAMIN J. CAYETANO**  
GOVERNOR



Department  
of Agriculture  
State of Hawaii

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Declaration of War on Banana Bunchy Top Virus Project Eradication Launched on the Big Island**

Today, State and County officials, along with representatives from Hawaii's banana and farming industries declared war on the Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV), a very serious disease of bananas. The group announced its plans for Project Eradication calling for the removal of **all banana plants** within a 10 square mile infestation zone in the North Kona District on the Big Island.

"With Big Island banana growers producing two-thirds of the State's bananas, protecting this island's banana industry is an important part of our diversified agriculture program and we would like to thank the farmers and residents involved in the eradication for their cooperation and recognition of the importance of this project," said Hawaii County Mayor Stephen K. Yamashiro.

"Eradication of BBTV from North Kona is a wise investment. By preventing the spread of the disease to other parts of the Big Island, we can protect our market share and encourage the expansion of diversified agriculture. Just as important, all of us on the Big Island can continue to grow and enjoy the bananas that we are now able to grow in our backyards."

"Banana farmers, their families, and everyone who want to protect our precious environment need the help of all our citizens," said Hawaii County Council Chairman James Arakaki.

"The men and women of the banana industry and the Mayor have taken an important first step towards saving our island's banana crop. By working together, we can meet this challenge. Everyone supports agriculture. Here's our chance to demonstrate that support."

Residents living in the infestation zone in the North Kona District are being requested to cooperate by allowing State Department of Agriculture personnel to treat and kill all banana plants. Surveys indicate more than 5,500 homes and farms within the infestation zone would be impacted. This yearlong eradication effort is projected to cost an estimated \$300,000.

"On behalf of the Big Island banana farmers, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the sacrifices that are being asked of residents and farmers living in North Kona," said Big Island Banana Growers Association President Delan Perry.

"With a successful eradication effort, there is great potential for Hawaii's banana industry, especially now following recent approval by the federal government allowing locally-grown green bananas to be exported to new markets including the U.S. mainland and Guam."

Under Project Eradication, State Department of Agriculture personnel will be going house-to-house canvassing the North Kona District. All banana plants will be injected with a lethal dose of herbicide. In most cases, treated plants should wither and die within a two-week period. There may be cases in which new shoots will need to be retreated. To prevent further spread of the disease to other areas, withering plants should not be disposed of until plants are completely dried.

The infestation zone in the North Kona District is bordered on the north by a line from Keahole Point to the junction of Kaiminani Drive and Queen Kaahumanu Highway, along Kaiminani Drive to the junction of Kaiminani Drive and Mamalahoa Highway, and continuing mauka of this junction. The southern boarder is set by a line running mauka from Keauhou Bay. This line runs between the Keauhou 1st ahupua'a and Keauhou 2nd ahupua'a. The forest tree line represents the eastern border, while the ocean represents the western border. The entire Palisades and Kalaoa Subdivisions are considered within the zone. The zone was determined by plant experts from the State Department of Agriculture and University of Hawaii-College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, based on findings of diseased plants, wind pattern, and buffer zones.

The destruction of all banana plants within the zone is estimated to take eight months, given no delays. Once every banana plant is killed, there will be a three-month waiting period. This is a precautionary measure to prevent reinfestation with the transmittal of the virus by its carrier, the banana aphid. In the best case scenario, residents in the North Kona District could begin replanting disease-free banana keikis in January, 2000.

"Often times government is criticized for not doing enough; in this case, we are aggressively working to eliminate BBTV from the Big Island but we need the support of the community," stressed James J. Nakatani, Chairperson for the State Department of Agriculture.

"We recognize the sacrifices at hand, but there is no other recourse. The Department has tried other alternatives which have resulted in slowing the spread of the disease. We were successful in eradicating BBTV on Kauai, and there's no reason why we can't make it happen in Kona by following the same strategy with the removal of all banana plants within an infestation zone."

Big Island residents outside of the zone can help by reporting any banana plant with disease-like symptoms. Infected plants are stunted and produce small, deformed fruits. In advanced stages of the disease, plants do not produce any fruit. The younger leaves of an infected plant are stunted, resulting in a bunchy appearance at the top of the plant. The edges of the leaves are yellowish and may curl upward. Early signs of an infected plant may show dark green streaks on the back of the stem portion of leaves.

Everyone can assist by not moving any banana plant or plant parts from BBTV infested areas. State law prohibits the movement of banana plants and plant parts from Oahu and the North Kona District of the island of Hawaii -- BBTV infested areas -- to other islands within the State. Anyone caught moving banana plants and plant parts from Oahu and the Big Island can face fines between \$100 and \$10,000, per violation.

For more information on the eradication project, or to report any infected banana plant, Big Island residents are urged to contact their nearest State Department of Agriculture Office at (808) 323-4565 (Kona Office) or (808) 974-4140 (Hilo Office). Residents are also invited to attend an informational meeting on January 20, 7:00 PM, at the Holualoa Amin Center.

Partner agencies participating in Project Eradication include the State Department of Agriculture, County Council of Hawaii, County of Hawaii, the Big Island Banana Growers Association, the Hawaii County Farm Bureau, and the University of Hawaii-College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources-Cooperative Extension Service.